DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 250 026 JC 840 552

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TITLE Evaluation of Napa Valley College's Student Orientation, Assessment, Advisement and Retention Program.
INSTITUTION Napa Valley Coll., Napa, CA.
PUB DATE 16 Feb 84
NOTE 12p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Community Colleges; Educational Counseling; Predictive Validity; *Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; *School Holding Power; School Orientation; *Student Personnel Services; *Testing Programs; Two Year Colleges; Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS *Napa Valley College CA

ABSTRACT

In fall 1983, Napa Valley College fully implemented its Student Orientation, Assessment, Advisement, and Retention (SOAAR) program, which consisted of assessment of first-time students' math and reading skills, advisement about enrolling in regular or developmental courses based on scores, course advisement, and the provision of information on college services, policies, and procedures. In fall 1983, 866 students participated in the SOAAR program. An analysis of student course transcripts, test scores, and survey responses indicated that, in comparison with students enrolled in comparable courses before the implementation of the SOAAR program, SOAAR students were less likely to: (1) complete their developmental courses in English and mathematics; (2) finish their introductory-level courses; and (3) earn a grade of C or higher in their developmental or regular classes. Although a number of factors might have contributed to the decline in student performance from fall 1982 to fall 1983, it was concluded that participation in the SOAAR program did not have a positive affect on student performance or persistence in their English and math classes. It was also concluded that test scores were not accurate predictors of student success and that SOAAR did not seem to increase student use of support services. Based on study findings, it was recommended that a number of modifications should be made to improve the effectiveness of the SOAAR program. (LAL)

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EVALUATION OF NAPA VALLEY COLLEGE'S

STUDENT ORIENTATION, ASSESSMENT, ADVISEMENT AND RETENTION PROGRAM

By

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February 16, 1984

JC 840 552

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NAPA VALLEY COLLEGE

EVALUATION OF

THE STUDENT ORIENTATION, ASSESSMENT, ADVISEMENT AND RETENTION PROGRAM

Major Findings, Recommendations and Conclusions

In the fall of 1983, Napa Valley College fully implemented its Student Orientation, Assessment, Advisement and Retention (SOAAR) program. This program, required of all fist-time students enrolled for six or more credits and for any student planning to take an English or arithmetic class for the first time at Napa Valley College, consists of the following activities: (1) administering an arithmetic and reading test to assess students' competency levels in those areas; (2) advising students to enroll in developmental or introductory English and mathematics courses on the basis of their test scores; (3) giving students advice on what classes to take; and (4) providing students with an overview of college academic support services, policies, and procedures. Designers of this program believed that the combination of skills assessment, advisement, course placement, and orientation to the college's academic support services would increase students' chances of completing their courses and remaining in college.

In fall, 1983, a total of 866 students participated in the SOAAR program. Supported by a grant from the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office, Napa Valley College staff members conducted a study to assess the extent to which the objectives of the SOAAR program were being achieved. The results of this study, summarized below, are based on an analysis of student course transcripts, scores on the tests, and a survey of participants in the SOAAR program.

Summary of Findings

Effects of the SOAAR Program on Course Completion Rates

It was anticipated that students who participated in SOAAR in fall, 1983, would have higher course completion rates and better grades in their English and mathematics classes than students enrolled in a comparable group of courses in fall, 1982, when the SOAAR program was not in place. Contrary to what was expected, the fall, 1983, students (SOAAR participants) were less likely than the fall, 1982, students who did not pass through SOAAR to:

(1) Complete their developmental classes in English (87% vs. 82%) and

mathematics (82% vs. 80%);

(2) Finish their introductory-level college courses in English (89% vs. 83%) and mathematcis (82% vs. 78%);

(3) Earn a grade of "C" or higher in their developmental courses in English (73% vs. 59%) and mathematics (61% vs. 56%); and

(4) Achieve a grade of "C" or better in their introductory college-level classes in English (73% vs. 63%) and mathematics (63% vs. 53%).

An additional finding of this study pertaining to course completion was that about 20% of the students enrolled in a developmental or introductory English and mathematics course on the first day of class in fall, 1983, withdrew from these classes before the start of First Census Week (third week of the quarter) and did not re-enroll in another English or mathematics class that term.

There are a variety of factors, external to the SOAAR program, that might have contributed to the decline in student performance from fall, 1982, to fall, 1983. The turmoil created by the uncertainty of state funding of community colleges and imposition of the course drop fee are two possible explanations for the sharp decrease in student performance from one year to the next. Nevertheless, it seems safe to conclude that participation in the SOAAR program did not have a positive effect on student performance and completion of their English and mathematics classes.

Student Success in Developmental Education Courses

Students referred to developmental courses in English and mathematics are expected to complete those classes and advance to the next highest level of that subject area the following term. Advocates of the SOAAR program believed that the chances of achieving each of these objectives could be enhanced if students were placed in the appropriate level of the developmental education sequence and if they were informed of the support services (e.g., tutoring, learning skills center, counseling) which they could avail themselves if they were in need of some assistance. Results of this study revealed that:

(1) Sixteen percent of the students enrolled in a developmental mathematics course in fall, 1983, moved on to a college-level mathematics course the following quarter; an additional 18% of the participants re-enrolled in another developmental mathematics class. The remaining 66% of those who enrolled in a developmental mathematics class in fall, 1983, elected not to continue building their basic skills in this vital subject area the following term; and

(2) Of those students enrolled in a developmental English course in fall, 1983, 11% enrolled in a college-level English course the following term and 30% re-enrolled in another developmental English class. The remaining 60% of the students who were in a developmental English class in fall, 1983, chose not to enroll in another English course the following quarter.

Validity of the English and Mathematics Tests as Predictors of Course Success

Test scores were used by the SOAAR program personnel for advising students to enroll in appropriate English and mathematics courses. The assumption upon which the assessment portion of SOAAR is based is that the closer the match between students' skills and the level at which the course is presented, the greater the likelihood that the students will complete their classes. The results of this study indicate that the tests used in the SOAAR program were not accurate predictors of student success.

(1) Two-thirds of the students who enrolled in a higher-level English class than was recommended successfully completed the course with a grade of "C" or higher.

(2) 46% of the students who enrolled in a higher-level math course than was recommended completed that class with a grade of "C" or higher.

(3) The grades students received in their developmental and introductory college-level English and mathematics classes were not highly correlated with their scores on the assessment tests.

Use of Academic Support Services

An important component of the SOAAR program is providing students with an overview of the academic support services available to them at the college. Information obtained from a survey showed that, although most students who participated in a SOAAR session found the information about support services helpful, only 12% took advantage of the services during the fall, 1983, quarter. This figure would have been much lower if students who withdrew from their classes and/or from the college had been included in the survey.

Recommendations

The results of this study demonstrate that, in the first quarter of operation, the SOAAR program did not come close to achieving its stated objectives. Such findings lead us to question whether the SOAAR program should be abandoned, modified, or allowed to continue in its present form. A review of the most common elements associated with successful models of community college assessment, advisement, and intervention suggests that several modifications should be made in the SOAAR program.

1. Assessment of students' skills should go beyond reading and arithmetic ability, to include study skills and, if possible, attitudes toward learning. Each of these skills are strongly related to student success in college.

2. There needs to be a direct link between the specific objectives of developmental courses and the levels of skills being assessed in the placement tests. The reading and arithmetic tests used in SOAAR provided very little diagnostic information about the problems students have with reading and mathematics. Furthermore, the tests were not directly related to the objectives and content of the English and mathematics courses to which students were being referred.

3. A record should be made for each student, containing pertinent information about their strengths and weaknesses, study skills, abilities, objectives, and the like. These records should then serve as a guide to the college developmental program staff charged with providing services to the student. Currently, staff members are only provided with student test scores.

4. Students referred to developmental reading classes should not be permitted to enroll concurrently in college-level academic or vocational courses. The only exception to this rule should be if the college-level course is paired or coordinated with the developmental reading and study skills classes.

5. Academic support services should be specifically integrated into the assessment, placement, and curricular components of the SOAAR program. Academic support service personnel (tutors, counselors, learning center staff, librarians) must not passively wait for students to come to them for help. Studies have consistently shown that, if left to their own volition, most students in need of assistance will not take advantage of the support services available to them. Academic support service personnel must actively seek out students and encourage them to participate in needed services.

6. An early-warning system should be instituted to notify and assist students who are in academic difficulty. Such a program should be designed to identify and provide assistance to students who are experiencing difficulty in a content class before the time of the first exam, when much attrition takes place.

7. Academic support service staff should work cooperatively with members in developmental and introductory courses with low student completion rates. Colleges that have used this approach have found it to be a successful method of increasing student completion rates in high-risk courses.

8. Faculty members should be asked to participate in the delivery of academic support services, particularly in the areas of advisement. This direct approach of providing advice could help increase the likelihood that students will enroll in appropriate classes needed to achieve their educational objectives. This recommendation emanates from the finding that two-thirds of the students enrolled in a developmental English course in fall, 1983, did not re-enroll in an English class the following term.

9. Each class in the developmental education sequence should have a clear set of performance objectives. The courses should be sequential so that each begins where the other leaves off. Requiring students to demonstrate mastery of specific performance objectives before they are permitted to enter the class should help improve articulation with other developmental and introductory college-level courses.

Conclusion

Since the early 1970s, there has been a steady increase in the number of students entering community colleges with serious deficiencies in basic skills, with poorly-developed study habits, and with inadequate mastery of high school subject matter. Results of testing programs showed that, in many community colleges, over 50% of the entering students are deficient in their reading, writing, and computational skills. Despite efforts to provide the vast numbers of under-prepared students with the support programs and assistance they need to succeed in college-level courses, only a small percentage of the students who could profit most from the assistance provided and for whom several of the services are especially designed take advantage of these programs. In the meantime, students continue to enroll in college-level courses in which neither they nor their instructors can succeed. This is reflected in the high course-attrition rates found in academic courses and in the results of nationwide surveys of instructors teaching community college-level courses, which show that over one-half of the faculty said their courses could be made better if they had "students who were better prepared to handle course requirements."

The factors of high course-attrition rates, failure to enroll in courses needed to complete educational objectives, and lack of sequence in student course-taking patterns are undermining students' chances of completing degree and certificate programs. Designing and implementing the SOAAR program was an important step in reversing these trends. With the necessary modifications, the SOAAR program can help the college to achieve the objectives of decreasing attrition and enhancing student academic success.

University of California

STUDENT SOAAR CHECKLIST

___ Complete and submit Application for Admission to the Admissions Office.

___ Complete Educational Planning Summary.

___ Make appointment to attend SOAAR session.

_____ _____
Weekday Date

_____ _____
Time Room No.

___ Attend SOAAR Session.

___ Plan your schedule and fill out Enroll Card at session.

___ Get Permit to Register at end of session.

___ Register for classes in Administration Building. Be sure to have with you:

___ Permit to Register
___ Completed Enroll Card
___ Placement Test Results
___ Application for Admission – if not already submitted
___ Pay any fees including Parking Permit
___ Be sure to attend the FIRST DAY of your classes or you may be DROPPED
___ Check back with a Counselor if you would like any assistance

NAPA VALLEY COLLEGE
STUDENT SERVICES

ADMISSIONS AND RECORDS – Application, registration and transcript services (Administration Building, ext. 233/234)

CAREER CENTER – Career planning, Resource library, Vocational Testing, EUREKA Computer Guidance System, Job Locator/Developer (Library, ext. 382)

CHRYSALIS CHILD/INFANT CARE CENTER – Provides bilingual, multicultural learning activities on sliding fee (Building 1500, 255-3244)

CLUBS – From Potters, Drama and Sports to Energy Alliance and Christian Fellowship

COUNSELING DEPARTMENT – Academic, Career, Personal and Group Counseling by appointment and scheduled walk-in basis (Administration Building, ext. 364/365/366)

EXTENDED OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM AND SERVICES (EOPS) – To assist all who may profit from education regardless of economics, social, and educational status (Building 100, ext. 377)

FINANCIAL AID – Campus jobs, Grants, Loans, Scholarships, and Enrollment Fee Grants (Building 100, ext. 301/302)

LIBRARY – Educational and Recreational materials to supplement classroom learning (Building 400, ext. 311/315)

MEDIA CENTER – Video and Audio Study and Tutorial Aids (Room 1028, ext. 237)

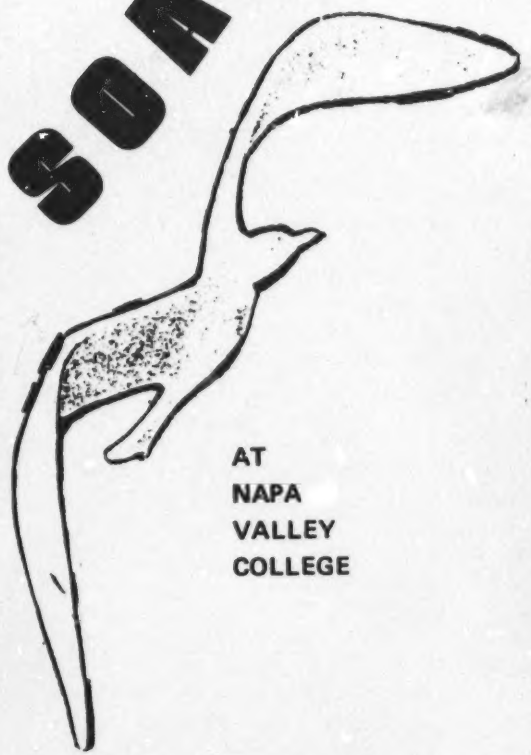
LEARNING SKILLS CENTER – Placement and practice tests, diagnostic learning services, tutors (Building 1000A, ext. 386/328/329)

SPECIAL SERVICES – Enabler to assist developmentally disabled and physically handicapped, Visual Scanner and wheelchairs (Administration Building, ext. 395)

VETERAN'S AFFAIRS OFFICE – Assistance, forms and information in regards to benefits (Building 100, ext. 381)

WOMEN'S RE-ENTRY PROGRAM – Personal, academic, and career advising for women returning to school after an absence... Classes focusing on Women's experiences (Administration Building, ext. 281/282)

SOAAR



AT
NAPA
VALLEY
COLLEGE

● STUDENT ORIENTATION,

ADVISING, ASSESSMENT,

and RETENTION PROGRAM

NAPA VALLEY COLLEGE
2277 Napa-Vallejo Highway
Napa, CA 94558
(707)255-2100

WHAT IS SOAAR?

The Student Orientation, Advising, Assessment and Retention Program is designed to . . .

1. Assist you in identifying courses and programs best suited to your goals.
2. Identify your level of ability in Arithmetic and English through required assessment.
3. Advise you of appropriate English course placement for new and continuing students.
4. Advise you of appropriate Arithmetic course placement.
5. Provide an overview of college services, regulations, procedures, and catalog for you.
6. Provide assistance in development of a course schedule for your first term at Napa Valley College.

WHY IS SOAAR?

This program provides assessment and advice in selecting appropriate English and Arithmetic classes. Careful choice of classes, along with development of attainable educational goals will improve your opportunity for success here. Through regular follow-up contact, we will assist you in assuring that you achieve the goals you set.

WHEN IS SOAAR?

The Program is activated preceding and during each registration period.

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HOW LONG IS A SOAAR SESSION?

The sessions will last from one and one-half hours to three and one-half hours depending on when you complete your one hour assessment session. The session serves 15 students.

WHO IS SOAAR FOR?

THE PROGRAM IS MANDATORY FOR . . .
The new student planning to enroll in a college for the first time.

Students planning to enroll in English and Arithmetic classes for the first time.

The program is optional for new transfer students.

HOW CAN I SOAAR?

Sign up for a SOAAR session through the Counseling Center appointment desk.
Assessment sessions can be scheduled through the Learning Skills Center at any time.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

The SOAAR Program is coordinated by the Office for Student and Career Development with assistance from the Admissions and Records Office, the Counseling Division, the Career Center, and the Learning Skills Center. Each of these offices can answer questions.

WHAT MUST I DO PRIOR TO THE SOAAR SESSION?

A. You must complete and submit your Application for Admission to Napa Valley College. You submit the application to the Admissions Office in the Administration Building.

B. After signing up for your SOAAR session you can complete the one hour assessment session at any time or one hour prior to your SOAAR session. Contact the Learning Skills Center for more information.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A SOAAR SESSION?

1. You must arrive ten minutes prior to the start of the session and verify attendance; additional students can be added as vacancies appear during the ten-minute check-in time only. Sessions will start promptly and no one will be admitted late.
2. You will first be given an orientation on the College services, regulations, and enrollment procedures and an opportunity to ask questions of Counselors about Napa Valley College.
3. You will then receive interpretation of your test scores with placement recommendations.
4. Your Educational Planning Summary will be reviewed, which will be kept on file for future counseling appointments. You are encouraged to bring high school and/or college transcripts.
5. Students will be placed in four advising groups . . .Transfer, Two-Year, Undecided, and Health Occupations . . . and assisted in planning their class schedules.
6. You will receive a permit-to-register card, which must be presented at time of registration in order to register for classes.

IS THERE MORE TO SOAAR?

The Program includes student follow-up to determine if assessment and advisement have led to greater student success. The new student file system provides the necessary data for follow-up. Students experiencing difficulty during the semester will be contacted to determine what assistance can be provided.